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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000911

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ALASANIA LEANS TOWARDS DIALOGUE;
OPPOSITION SPLIT VISIBLE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Only about 500 protesters attended the meeting in front of Parliament on May 13. Irakli Alasania (Alliance), who did not attend the meeting at Parliament on Wednesday, announced separately that his supporters would not continue to block the road in front of the Georgian Public Broadcaster citing it as a show of good faith, noting that blocking roads was counterproductive. Nonetheless, a number of other protest organizers announced a plan to start blocking roads in various districts of Tbilisi starting May ¶16. GoG officials briefed the diplomatic corps on its plans and said, if necessary, it would not hold a parade on Georgian Independence Day, May 26 to avoid conflict. Tbilisi Mayor, Gigi Ugalava stated the government's position that the road blockages and protests were illegal but would continue to be tolerated. Meanwhile, Alasania made further statements welcoming dialogue but has not made a break from the non-parliamentary opposition who despite evidence to the contrary, continue to tout their unity. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Although protest leaders are maintaining the facade of unity of purpose, it is clear to virtually all observers that this unity is fragile at best. Alasania's statements on the decision to remove some traffic roadblocks and entertain dialogue were welcome, but quickly rebutted by other members who vowed to continue the corridor of shame in front of the Public Broadcasters and block more roads. For its part, the GoG plans to be patient but has been signaling the diplomatic community that at some point, the protests need to end. Alasania and others are being cautious, only incrementally moving towards negotiations. The GoG, in contrast, plans to move forward with its initiative. From our perspective, the GoG is making every attempt to include the non-parliamentary opposition in dialogue but will not wait indefinitely for Alasania and others so called moderates to come around. End Comment.

Protest Plans/Tactics As Clear As Mud

¶3. (C) Alasania announced his intention to unblock traffic in front of the Georgian Public Broadcasters building. David Gamkrelidze (Alliance - New Rights) said that he had always thought "blocking traffic was creating more inconveniences to residents than the authorities." (Embassy Comment: We had privately heard from numerous sources that Gamkrelidze was a strident supporter of blocking the Georgian Public Broadcasters road. Gamkrelidze's statement represents at least some acknowledgment that blocking roads was counterproductive. End Comment.) Nino Burjanadze countered that she will picket the Public Broadcasters and maintain the "corridor of shame." Davit Berdzenishvili (Alliance - Republicans) attempted to explain away the apparent contradiction in approaches by simply saying there was no contradiction. Other leaders such as Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservatives) and Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) tried to downplay the announcement.

14. (C) The latest plan according to some in the non-parliamentary opposition includes picketing the Public Broadcaster for four hours on May 14 and May 15; blocking roads in the districts of Nadzaladevi on May 16, Isani and Didube on May 17; and holding a rally May 18 in front of Rustavi 2 TV. On May 19, a rally will be held outside the Presidential Residence and on May 20, Giorgi Gachechiladze QPresidential Residence and on May 20, Giorgi Gachechiladze (Utsnobi - brother of Levan Gachechiladze) will lead a march on Tbilisi from Batumi culminating in joining the opposition's public parade to mark Independence Day on May 26. Nino Burjanadze acknowledged the plan was not fully agreed upon and other events were being planned. On May 13, two meetings were held at Gachechiladze's office and Gamkrelidze's office in which Burjanadze and others did not attend leaving many to speculate that the non-parliamentary opposition is breaking into two groups.

Alasania Creeps Toward Dialogue - Is Anybody With Him?

15. (C) Alasania's recent public statements indicate a willingness to engage in dialogue, though it remains unclear who among the non-parliamentary opposition, are with him. Members of his own alliance appear unconvinced. David Usupashvili (Alliance - Republicans) and Gamkrelidze supported the decision to remove road blocks, but have been less vocal about dialogue with Gamkrelidze recently calling it pointless. Usupashvili said he would only discuss the President's resignation. Alasania has told us that he was working to convince Gachechiladze and others that negotiation is the only end-game but so far has received no public backing from any non-parliamentary leader. Alasania's own statements have often been internally inconsistent as pointed

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out in his recent appearance on the BBC program "Hardtalk". The host challenged him on how one could call for dialogue and the President's resignation at the same time asking "what is there to negotiate about?" Alasania demurred, instead saying that Saakashvili's denial of a political crisis exacerbated the situation and then said that the protesters were countering the terror the GoG had undertaking against the protesters since April 9. The host then interrupted and called Alasania's statement "patently untrue" citing the GoG's proposals and general patience of the GoG. In short, Alasania's performance highlighted that supporting an ultimatum calling for the President's resignation while maintaining one is open to dialogue is a problematic approach.

Burjanadze - No Surrender

16. (C) On the other side, Nino Burjanadze appears to be the leader of those opposing any sort of compromise. Along with Burjanadze, Eka Beselia (United Georgia), and Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) are among the most vocal in calling for an escalation and, according to Alasania, provoking a conflict on May 26. A longtime Burjanadze aide (please strictly protect) told PolChief that she was frustrated and disillusioned with how the process has unfolded and Burjanadze's role in it. The aide said that the protests and ultimatums would lead to no actual progress on issues of importance and although she was not going to make it public, she would not be working for Burjanadze any longer. Burjanadze apparently has been hearing the message both publicly and privately making a statement claiming she is not radical. Burjanadze, likely not helping her case, said that she "would have been radical if (she) called for hanging Saakashvili", but she had not done so.

GoG Explains Plans to DipCorps

17. (C) In a DipCorps briefing May 13, Speaker David Bakradze, Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugalava, Deputy Minister of Interior Eka Zguladze, and a number of other GoG representatives explained their intentions and answered

questions. Bakradze said that the GoG was focused on not perpetuating the zero-sum game of Georgian politics and expressed his hope and the GoG's desire to include the non-parliamentary opposition in meaningful discussion. Bakradze said that the GoG would not be held hostage to unrealistic ultimatums. At the same time, Bakradze left the door open for parliamentary elections if other reforms and local elections proceeded in a positive, non-polarizing manner. Zguladze addressed the group and said that political dialogue would not interfere with ongoing investigations into wrongdoing on both sides. Zguladze said that if Ombudsman Sozar Subari and defense attorneys want to speak with investigators or detainees, MoIA encouraged them to do so. Zguladze extended the same to the Dipcorps saying that Diplomatic officials could speak to the investigator of any individual case they desired. Zguladze then outlined a number of incidents where abuses were alleged but when followed up, individuals had given fake names to hospitals or the press making some investigations difficult if not impossible.

18. (C) Ugalava explained that street blockages by the non-parliamentary opposition were illegal. (Embassy Comment: This corresponds with our understanding that a group of protesters is allowed to block a street but using objects such as cages is unlawful. End Comment.) Ugalava said that although illegal, the GoG was tolerating the protests but although illegal, the GoG was tolerating the protests but that they could not go on forever. Responding to the non-parliamentary opposition's plan to confront the traditional military parade on May 26 with a parade of their own, Ugalava said that they would simply cancel the parade and not give in to the non-parliamentary opposition's plan to stage a confrontation. Bakradze spoke up and said the non-parliamentary opposition wanted a boxing match, while the GoG was using the sumo technique of simply stepping aside. Ugalava said that he hoped May 26 could be used as a day of political reconciliation. Both Bakradze and Ugalava said that they would avoid the law enforcement option but would not allow protesters into buildings or to shut down major railroads or highways. In public statements, both Bakradze and Ugalava criticized the non-parliamentary opposition for its plans to use a national holiday for its own narrow interests.
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